



## ***‘Experience Baseball’ Chicago debut to raise funds for ‘Lost Boyz’ in South Shore***

*By George Castle, CBM Historian  
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Tobias Blake had his “ah-ha” moment right outside Oriole Park at Camden Yards. The direction of his life changed then and there.

An original Orioles fan growing up in Baltimore now transplanted to South Bend, Blake took a tour of Camden Yards during a long lunch while attending a conference on getting college students involved in diversity issues.

“Outside the ballpark, an African-American man approaches me and asks if I have spare change,” Blake said. “I gave him \$1. He then asked if I could buy him something to eat. I saw a Jimmy John’s nearby. I bought him a sandwich.

“The man said he lived around here. He was in his late 30s. He says he’s an Orioles fan, too. I asked if had ever been at an Orioles game. He looked at me like it was the stupidest question I could have asked. ‘I’ve never been to a game here. Look at me,’ he said.”

Blake recalled how the Orioles marked the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Camden Yards with out-field seats at the same price -- \$4 – as when the stadium opened in 1992.

“And here’s a guy who’s never been to a game living right there,” he said. “I’ve been to dozens of games and I don’t live there anymore. I asked how is this possible?”

Blake and associates will attempt to answer that question definitively with their new “Experience Baseball” organization. After working in the University of Notre Dame’s office of multi-cultural student programs, he believes he’s found his calling with a non-profit community development organization incorporated Jan. 25.



**Tobias Blake, founder of Experience Baseball, on the road between Houston and Kansas City. He publicized the organization in both cities.**

Said Blake: “We’ll look at developing research and educational resources to connect baseball with community development in areas (around ballparks) to figure out why someone who lives downtown has every bit of a reason to go to games, but can’t afford to get a sandwich, or let alone go to the game.”

### **Reiss, Buck O’Neil film, Sox-Orioles tickets highlight July 2 event**

“Experience Baseball” will have its first formal Chicago program at 4 p.m. Tuesday, July 2, at the Conference and Learning Center at U.S. Cellular Field. For a donation of \$20, attendees will hear a presentation by Dr. Steven Reiss, professor emeritus at Northeastern Illinois University and author of several books about baseball history and its urban impact.

“Buck O’Neil and Black Baseball in Chicago,” a 2008 documentary produced by the Chicago Baseball Museum, will be shown after Reiss’ talk. Capping the event will be a tailgate party catered by Uncle John’s BBQ in The Cell’s parking lot and tickets to that night’s White Sox-Orioles game.

“It’s part of our MO now: to improve quality of life in urban communities that are home to professional baseball,” Blake said “Professional ball has arbitrary things to connect to community development. I moved around, but I don’t have ties to one urban community. My community is baseball. We’d leverage some of those resources to bring them back to the community. We’d do stadium and community tours.”



**Nicolas Sanchze and Isaac Lorton, Notre Dame students and Experience Baseball interns, in front of the entrance to the Negro Leagues Baseball Museum in Kansas City.**

Blake cited the South Bend Silver Hawks as an example to boost community development next to baseball. The team wants to build a three-level party deck at Coveleski Stadium, home to the Class-A Midwest League Silver Hawks. Nearby are vacant warehouses and public housing.

“I would bet right across from the Silver Hawks are families who’ve never been to a game,” Blake said. “It’s a process to get behind: is a \$7 million party deck going to attract new fans?”

Blake and two interns attended the Major League Baseball Diversity Business

Summit in Houston. “Organizations like ours can pitch what we do,” he said. Then the trio publicized “Experience Baseball” at two events in Kansas City.

## Lost Boyz beneficiary of July 2 event

The July 2 event at The Cell not only will raise awareness for “Experience Baseball,” but also raise funds for Lost Boyz Inc., a Chicago organization working to decrease violence and improve the social conditions among youth in the South Shore community. Lost Boyz’s mission is achieved by providing quality athletic and leadership training, and innovative ideas geared for at-risk youth. The organization fields two youth baseball teams.

“Lost Boyz tries to get inner-city kids into college,” Blake said. “It’s bent toward community development.

“We’re differentiated from baseball RBI Programs. I get goose bumps at that, I love it. But at the end of the day, you can’t eat a baseball. If you’re not getting economic improvement, not improving education, you’re not doing all to help the kids.”

To register for the July 2 event at The Cell, log onto <http://experiencebaseball.org/chicago>.

“We’re still figuring this out, what we can develop,” Blake said. “Are we just about educating fans?”

“We’d love to sponsor young adults with college scholarships and research grants to study the relationship between the community and baseball. Also, we’d like to believe we’re improving the quality of life through education and economic stimulus. We hope to have some influence on all teams.

“We’re five months old, and privately funded. We’re young, but we’re passionate baseball fans and we’re socially conscious.”



**The contemporary mural depicting Buck O’Neil and the Negro Leagues’ Kansas City Monarchs, on the south side of the original Paseo YMCA building in which Chicago’s Rube Foster founded the first official Negro National League in 1920.**